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LA CARTA PERLENTE
Diplomatic Memoires of E.F. Moellhausen
25 July 1943 - 2 May 1945

EDITED BY VIRGINIC RUSCA

EPILOGUE
The Capitulation
(Beginning Page 439)

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Baron Parrilli

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A.G. Spence

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LA CARTA PERDENTE
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25 July 1943 - 2 May 1945

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EPILOGUE
The Capitulation
(Beginning Page 439)

For the first time a complete reconstruction has been made, bit by bit, of the complex machinery of the German surrender in Italy. This reconstruction, which is strictly faithful to fact, and is carefully documented, is the result of lengthy consultations with the participants. Many difficulties had to be overcome to obtain the information necessary to create a true picture of the moving story of the events that preceded the autumn of '44, up to the final surrender, when at noon on the 2nd of May 1945, the German forces in Italy ceased fighting.

In this book I have tried to describe the principal events that took place in Italy during the period of the German occupation; events that for the most part I personally observed. At the time of the surrender I was no longer in Italy. For the reasons stated in the preceding chapter I had been sent on a special mission to the Iberian Peninsula. I was not, therefore, present at the meetings that led to the capitulation.

Later, however, I had the opportunity of talking with the actors in the last scene of the drama of the Axis, from whom I learned the details of the arrangements of the meetings.

Let us review the preliminary events.

The idea of contacting the Allies was first considered by the Germans in the autumn of '44. At Bagni de Lucca, where Kesselring had his

GHQ at that time, Wolff approached General of Aviation Ritter von Pohl. It was a very vague feeler. Wolff did not wish to start an argument or to frankly unmask his thoughts or intentions. The point of departure for attacking the question was that of the recent reverses suffered by the German Armies.

In December of '44, Wolff for the second time made known his sentiments to Rahn; this took place at the Villa Bescana, where Rahn and his wife had been hosts to Wolff after the bombing of the Villa Bassetti.

In the East as in the West now and always more serious reverses struck the Reich. The secret weapons that had been promised for so long a time had not yet appeared. It was already rumored that Hitler had lost his mind. The German forces in Italy, short of gasoline, weapons, munitions, means of transport, and without air cover, were coping with an Allied advance. The Germans no longer possessed air combat strength and the enemy had control of the air without opposition. Demoralization was growing among the troops. Kesselring himself, who was noted for his tenacity and ability in defensive warfare, admitted that it would be difficult indeed to hold back the British and Americans when these should decide to take the offensive. If the German resistance became desperate, it might possibly prolong the war several weeks and even several months; but as regards the final result it was no longer possible to nurse illusions. The planned attack in the Ardennes would not be able to reverse the positions.

Rahn, * * * * * agreed with Wolff in judging that there was no possibility of Germany continuing to fight and that it was imperative that every effort should be made to stop a last useless sacrifice of human life. On the political side the Ambassador saw no possibility of a rupture in the opposite party while the war lasted.

3.

Nevertheless no decisions were reached and it was agreed that they would await a more propitious moment.

In January of 1945, Baron Parrilli communicated with the Lieutenant of the SS, Guido Zimmer, head of the IV Office of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt of Milan (CIC) that he had a means of contacting the Anglo-Americans through Switzerland. The motive impelling Parrilli to take this step may be found in his desire to prevent the Germans accomplishing their planned destruction of the power plants and factories of northern Italy.

For the same reasons Cardinal Schuster had served as intermediary between the Italian Partisans and the Germans.

In February Parrilli crossed the border into Switzerland and contacted his friend Prof. Max Rasmann, a Swiss national.

Rasmann, in addition to the humane motive, was desirous of preserving the Port of Genco and the Italian railway system, which were of particular interest to the Swiss economy.

Rasmann undertook to make all the arrangements, and called in Major Waibel, one of the heads of the Swiss intelligence service, who was a friend of long standing. He requested Waibel to give him all possible help in a very difficult situation.

Waibel got in touch with Mr. Allen W. Dulles, personal representative of Roosevelt in Switzerland and head of the Office of Strategic Services operating in the territory of the Confederacy.

Dulles saw that the project was worthy of consideration and decided to give a hearing to Parrilli.

4.

In the first meeting of Americans, Swiss, and Italians, Dulles did not appear, but had himself represented by his ~~secretary~~ ^{T. P. ...} Gero von Gavernits.

Gavernits asked for the names of the Germans with whom it would be possible to establish contact.

The first names given by Parrilli did not impress Dulles' secretary. He, however, evinced more interest when Parrilli mentioned the name of Dollmann.

Parrilli had not yet gotten in touch with Dollmann in regard to the matter, but from his personal knowledge of the man he knew Dollmann would be interested in a negotiation of this kind. Besides, Parrilli was aware of the fact that Dollmann had favorably received a letter from Captain Visetti, who, in the name of Cardinal Schuster, asked him to do all in his power to prevent the destruction of Northern Italy.

On his return from Switzerland, on the 1st of March, Parrilli had a meeting with Dollmann in Milan in Zimmer's apartment.

After the loss of Rome, Dollmann was appointed liaison between Kesselring and Wolff; although he had lost some standing, he was still of importance. He was living at Reggio, where, in addition to accomplishing his liaison tasks, he had tried to act as mediator between the Wehrmacht and the Partisans, at least in the sector controlled by his office.

With the greatest enthusiasm Dollmann accepted the proposal of meeting Roosevelt's representative. He, at first, thought that the Americans were desirous of meeting the Germans because they had finally realized that destroying Germany meant opening the door of Europe to Russia.

Parrilli managed to avoid the subject; he wanted at all costs to establish contact between the Americans and the Germans.

When Wolff was informed by Dollman of the opportunity that had presented itself, he kept the ball on the bounce. The invitation came at the right moment. He asked his collaborators to go as quickly as possible to Switzerland to see what the Americans wanted.

On the 3rd of March Parrilli, Dollmann, and Zimmer presented themselves at the Swiss border. Parrilli crossed, giving the prearranged password, "Pierluigi". Dollmann and Zimmer managed to enter Switzerland with the help of Waibel, who had given special instructions to the frontier guard.

An immediate meeting with Dulles and Gaevernitz was impossible as, for the time being, they were not available. Parrilli took the initiative in presenting Huzmann to the Germans as a representative having the confidence of Dulles.

The conference between Huzmann and Dollmann opened on a classical argument. Dollmann talked of the necessity of saving Europe from Bolshevism, expressing surprise that the Allies had not yet thought of uniting with the Germans in an anti-Russian crusade.

Attacking the subject directly, Huzmann announced to Dollmann that the Allies were prepared to contend with any desperate last stand of the Germans, but that it would not be worth while for Germany to continue fighting because there was no chance of a rupture between the Anglo-Americans and the Russians, at any rate while military operations against the Reich continued. There remained only one way open to the Germans: that of shortening the war by the capitulation of the German troops in Italy opposing the Anglo-Americans.

A surrender of this kind would be hailed as a patriotic gesture (like that made the 20th of July 1944 by the Generals Witalen, Beck and

others) and a clever political move that the Germans would be very wrong not to make.

At this point Dollman, realizing that his interlocutor wanted much and offered little, jumped to his feet, indignant and red in the face, saying, "Indeed what do you expect of me? That I should betray my country?"

Husmann replied that he did not expect anything but that he considered the words "betrayal" and "traitor" were not pertinent; that the Allies recognized and respected an honest man who would help in ending the slaughter of warfare, as they had proven in the case of Badoglio, and of Grandi, and of Mannerheim.

It was not till the afternoon of the 3rd of March that the group was joined by Mr. Paul ^XHlum, whom Dulles had delegated as his representative at this first meeting.

Hlum, having been requested by Husmann to express his opinion to the Germans who were ready to cooperate in bringing the war to an end and avoiding the useless waste of human life, said (in French), "The material and moral damage caused by this war in Europe has been so great that the Allies will have need of every man of good will for the reconstruction. Any one who helps to shorten the war will have proven that he is a man of good will."

At the end of the meeting, Dollmann noted down succinctly the American ideas as follows:

1. No power in the world will be able to separate the Anglo-Americans from the Russians.
2. Germany had lost the war.
3. The Allies would not have dealt with representatives of Hitler or of Himmler.

4. In this contact being made between the Allies and the Germans, the discussions could only deal with the Allied Zone.
5. That the only thing that was left for an honest German to do, was, in the interest of the German people, to help shorten the war in every possible way, which, if it were carried on would involve the German nation in an incredible struggle.

The second meeting between the Germans and the Americans took place at Zurich. In addition to Dollmann and Zimmer, Wolff and his aide, Wanner, were present.

The group was received at the Swiss frontier by Parrilli, Busmann, and a representative of Major Waibel.

The illegal crossings of the Swiss border by the German Army officers, which was aggravated by the fact that they belonged to the SS, was due solely to the personal initiative of Waibel.

The Swiss Government was not aware of this infraction of the Swiss laws, this breach of Swiss neutrality.

Busmann and Waibel had taken the initiative at their own risk and peril. The successful ending justified their deed and merited the gratitude of the Government of the Confederation.

During the journey from the frontier to Zurich, Busmann retired alone with Wolff to a first class reserved compartment. There they had a conference that lasted not less than seven hours.

Busmann began his talk with a question that apparently had no reference to the subject but which served as a basis for his argument. He asked Wolff if he, in his position of great responsibility had ever had occasion to discuss problems with leaders of industry, of finance, of science, and if he had ever listened to the briefs of eminent jurists. Wolff replied that he had not.

"That is a pity", observed Ruzmann, "because with our eyes we see only a part of our surroundings. Roosevelt, for example, in addition to his regular diplomatic and military intelligence services, has the habit of sending his personal friends to foreign countries as observers. Consider Dulles, for example, who is not Ambassador in Bern, and does not even belong to the Diplomatic Corps, but is one of the leading lawyers in America; he now finds himself in Switzerland as observer and personal representative of the President of the United States. He reports directly to Roosevelt and is responsible to Roosevelt only.

Ruzmann spoke at length about Roosevelt as a man and as a statesman, and presented him as the personification of the American people. He remarked that in time of war even democracies become, in a sense, dictatorships. With the substantial difference that, however, the responsible chiefs are always aware that they must render account to parliament of their actions and decisions. Even in time of war, in democratic governments there may be elections and laws passed by parliament, while dictators, being unreachably and uncontrolled, give account of their actions to no one and in that way the possibility of going astray is increased considerably.

Wolff listened with attention.

Proceeding with his theme Ruzmann spoke enthusiastically of the British Empire and of Churchill and then also of Russia and Stalin. He then pointed out to Wolff the difference between realism in politics and a moral sense in a private individual. He made a special effort to clarify the differences between Churchill and Roosevelt on the one hand and Stalin on the other, in regard to the interests that united them.

"The Anglo-Saxons", he said, "are accustomed to solve difficult problems one after the other and until they have disposed of the principal problem, they do not allow their attention to be distracted by secondary or trivial matters. While the Germans were trying to create the millenium in Germany, Churchill limited his efforts to trying to assure peace for 20 or 30 years. In the destiny of the individual as in the destiny of nations, unforeseen factors occur such as the inordinate ambition to wish to plan the course of the centuries."

Wolff interrupted, "You have talked much of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and their people. What, now, do you think of Hitler? Is it intentional that you have avoided speaking of him?"

Hummel replied in the negative and added that every man was guided in his actions by three fundamental factors: reason, sentiment and conscience.

Conscience is not born of instinct, it is a complex that is greatly influenced by atavism and by education. Using this as an example, he demonstrated that sensibility and conscience were very little developed in Hitler.

"But Hitler does not even use reason in his present way of acting and thinking. He belongs to the category of the possessed."

A long discussion resulted. Hummel demonstrated that Hitler was dominated by an obsession, while Stalin had to be credited with at the least an absolutely rationalistic mentality. When, for instance, Roosevelt informed Stalin that Congress, the Senate and even the American people, would never accept the alliance with an atheist and organizer of world revolution, Stalin did not hesitate to re-establish the Church in a few weeks, to wipe out the "Komintern", and to establish a new national anthem.

Hitler, instead, continued quarrelling with the churches, closing places of culture, persecuting religion. He continually attacked the Jews of America and England, and tirelessly pushed the dispersal and extermination of those in Europe. This was the essential difference between Stalin and Hitler: one man was a political realist, the other a madman with an ideological complex.

Continuing, Huisman followed and pictured the developments of the war up to the time that Churchill himself had admitted that the situation of the Allies was notably better because of the inexcusable errors committed by Hitler. If one considered events objectively, one had to admit that the United States did not enter into the war of their own free will. Roosevelt indisputably deserves the credit of having foreseen the inevitability of intervention on the part of his country. Also at the very beginning the President had made every effort to avoid war. Then, due to events he had been compelled to help England. In the final analysis, however, it was not Roosevelt who decided the intervention of the United States, but the incredible deed of the Japanese, who, with the methods of gangsters and the advantage of a military surprise, thought that they could in one night force a great nation to bend the knee.

Had Hitler and Ribbentrop influenced the Japanese to strike and act in this manner? At any rate, the Japanese, through Pearl Harbor, succeeded in one night in achieving a result that probably could not have been accomplished in many months, with millions spent in propaganda, namely, the fusion of the American people into a single block facing the problems of the war.

Huisman continued. "On the other hand, in the long years of fighting, years that are the bloodiest in the history of the world, the opposing forces of the Germans and the Russians succeeded in doing nothing more than slapping

each other in the face. The losses of the Russians have been immense, both in actual combat and as a result of the occupation of vast sections of the Soviet territories by the Germans. But the sacrifices of the Russians gave the Anglo-Saxons the time necessary to overcome their critical situation and their enforced conduct of the war on a defensive basis. Now, in the last phase of the conflict, they have reached the Rhine with a staggering advantage both in men and material. The preparations were long and difficult but once again the effect will be cataclysmic.

Hitler frequently spoke of Providence. It does not matter what you call it — Omnipotence, God, or Providence. But if you observe the developments of the last years retrospectively, you can readily see that it was not the will of Providence to guide Hitler to victory.

It is evident that the German Army, created from an impoverished people by a fanatic like Hitler, was able to enormously weaken the Russian forces, but it is also apparent that the Stalin of today is not the same as at the beginning of the war, and likewise that the Bolshevism of today is not the same as that of before the war."

Wolff had listened attentively to Rumann's discourse. He began to talk himself, recalling the years of his youth, his despair for Germany and for her future as a nation, torn apart by a dozen different political parties, all striving against one another, and how, in his desire to find some means of a rebirth, he became interested in and made the acquaintance of Hitler, whose life had always been a very simple one, but who had made the mistake of surrounding himself with incapable assistants.

Wolff continued, outlining the character of some of these collaborators: Goering, for example, with his bombast, his vanity, his luxury, was a mere shell. The judgment that he formed of Ribbentrop, weighing the political and diplomatic qualities of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich, was even more negative. He ended with the question, "Why does the world hate Hitler?"

Rusmann replied, "Even in private life a failure is criticised and censured; even by associates and friends, while success provokes the admiration of everybody. The greater the position of a man, the more he is in the public eye, correspondingly the more severe will the critics be. If Hitler had achieved success, many things would have been overlooked, and any picaresques would have been submerged in the tide of admiration. But the will of Providence, the decline of German power, Hitler's own mistakes, indicated clearly that from failure to failure, the end must be near. Horrible deeds have been unveiled to the world that called down on him universal execration. The destiny of Hitler is already formed -- the molds are fixed. To continue the war would mean only turning the German cities into slaughter houses and cutting short the existence of thousands."

"But", said Wolff, "the Allies wish to destroy the German people."

Rusmann countered, "It is not possible to destroy a people. Even Hitler did not succeed in exterminating the Hebrews. One can wipe out a caste. You and I lived in the times of William II. That era passed with the first World War. You and I lived in the times of the Caesar, and in the Russian Revolution princes and grand dukes disappeared. But the Russian and German people still remain. And after this war the ruling class in Germany will be wiped out, but a nation of 80 million people cannot be wiped out. Not the Allies, but the Germans themselves, in obstinately insisting on fighting this foolish and hopeless war to the bitter end, can destroy their people and their country."

The longer the conflict lasts the greater will be the misery, the greater the possibility of famine."

"From what you have told me", replied Wolff, "I must believe that you have an exact understanding of the psychology of German officers. Add to that the military training they have received. The result is that the very foundations of our existence are obedience and loyalty to our oaths. For these principles we can die, but we cannot break them and continue to live."

"Does the principle of obedience prevent your thinking?" asked Busmann. In addition to obedience, ought not those who find themselves in high places reflect on the orders they are about to issue? You have taken an oath of loyalty to Hitler. But hasn't this same Hitler stated that anything is just and right that is for the good of the German people? Isn't Hitler a symbol? Do you think you should keep your oath to a man when you personally are convinced that to continue the war will result in ruin for the German people? The generals who organized the plot of July 20th were not bad Germans, but men who, having seen that the war was lost, wanted to end it as soon as possible for the good of the people and of the country. History will judge them; they will be considered as heroes and patriots, not as traitors. Isn't this the conflict that is going on in your mind, General Wolff? In the bottom of your heart even you are convinced that the war is irremediably lost for Germany. When you return to Italy with what conviction, with what justification can you issue orders to your soldiers to fight and die for a lost cause?"

Wolff asked Busmann to leave him alone for a while. Snow had blocked the line and at Goscheners the train had to come to a halt.

After a half hour the conversation was resumed. Wolff asked Busmann what grounds he thought would be acceptable for the opening of negotiations with the Anglo-Americans.

14.

Rusmann stipulated that the discussions must be limited entirely to military questions, because if they went into political matters only the great leaders of the Allies, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, could make the decision. The military surrender of a single sector, on the other hand, was quite within the competence of General Eisenhower.

Wolff stated that neither Hitler nor Himmler knew of his journey to Switzerland. He himself had decided to take the step after hearing what Dollmann had to say and after the talks he had had with Parilli at Fasano, especially as he felt it was imperative that he personally should evaluate the situation.

The discussion continued and Rusmann asked Wolff the question which initiated the final step: "Shall the greatest tragedy in German history take place without any German having the courage to act for the good of humanity? I am sure that you realize that the back of the German people is broken, and that nothing further can be hoped for from them. You, as well as Marshall Kesselring, command troops in a sector that is completely separate from the other zones of operation, and are therefore able to initiate, and bring to a conclusion, a plan that will directly have its effect in shortening the war, independently of the other organizations in the center of the Reich, a plan that will have undoubted repercussions, on the other fronts. Under these conditions everything seems to point to you as the man chosen for the fulfillment of a mission that your people can neither ignore nor forget."

The group took up their residence in Zurich in Rusmann's house, where they had planned the meeting with the Americans. They, however, hesitated to come at the last moment as Dulles' suspicions had been aroused. He thought that Wolff was acting as an agent of Himmler, and his conviction was based on the latest information received by the Americans, according to which

Kaltenbrunner was trying to contact the Allies in Switzerland. It was another example of the extraordinary suspicion of the Americans in regard to every move undertaken by the Germans, which suspicion almost caused the whole plan to fail. It was Ruzmann who, by exerting great pressure, finally succeeded in inducing Dulles to receive Wolff.

This was not the only time the negotiations nearly broke down, for several times they were in danger of shipwreck.

If this did not happen, it is thanks to Ruzmann, Waibel and Parrilli, who, besides having to overcome certain technical obstacles, had to create a basis of understanding, adjusted to the completely different mentalities of the Americans and the Germans, differences that would have caused the breaking off of negotiations at the first disagreement or misunderstanding.

After introductions had been made, Ruzmann asked the following questions of Wolff: "General, as the result of our talk on the train are you convinced that Germany has definitely lost the war?"

Wolff: "Yes."

Ruzmann: "Did you also understand that we cannot discuss in Switzerland any problems concerning the Reich, but only those affecting the some of operations in Italy?"

Wolff: "Yes."

Ruzmann: "Twice you have formally assured me that your trip to Switzerland has been undertaken without the knowledge of Hitler and Himmler, and that your presence here can in no way be considered as your being the agent or representative of these two persons?"

Wolff: "Yes."

Ruzmann: "From our talk your final conclusion was that the only possible thing was an unconditional surrender, as any other form of surrender would bring the matter into the field of politics, and thereby of unsurmountable problems?"

Wolff: "Yes."

Then Rasmann added: "If, in spite of this, you should attempt to extend the present discussion to the whole Reich, it is just as well that you should realize that these discussions would end in 30 seconds — am I right, Mr. Dulles?"

Dulles agreed, and Rasmann, after a few words, withdrew and left the German with the Americans. Their talk lasted more than an hour and Wolff came out from it satisfied; and Dulles declared himself pleased with the visitor.

The following day another meeting took place between the Germans and the Americans, at which the Swiss were also present.

Those participating were Wolff, Dollmann, Rasmann, Waibel, and Gaevernits. The problem of the Partisans was discussed and the proclamation was drafted that would have to be issued at the time of the surrender.

The meeting broke up under the best auspices.

When Wolff, Dollmann, Wenner, Zimmer and Parrilli returned to Italy they realized that Berlin suspected the negotiations because Kaltenbrunner, in the name of Himmler, had sent a telegram to Wolff forbidding contact with the Allies and ordering the arrest of Parrilli.

Kaltenbrunner's telegram did not worry Wolff too much. He knew he could justify his trip into Switzerland by making it appear as an attempt at creating a rift in the enemy camp.

After the first trip of Dollmann, at the request of Dulles, ^{2ND} ~~Parri~~ ^{Parri} and ^{2ND} ~~Umschani~~ ^{Umschani} were set free, and were allowed to go to Switzerland; even for this Wolff had a reason, as the two chiefs of the Partisans had served to obtain the liberation of Col. Munsche, ex-aide of Hitler, who was a prisoner of the Allies.

The transfer at that time of Kesselring from the Italian to the Western Front came as a surprise to all.

The successor was not named, and Wolff was no longer in a position to treat with the Military Commander. Parrilli was asked to inform Dulles of the new conditions that had arisen.

Parrilli accepted this new mission, in spite of the danger of being machine gunned by the Allied Air Force, which almost incessantly patrolled the road between Milan and Chiasso, and also the danger he ran from the SD suspicions and surveillance because they could not understand how Wolff could permit a man to wander freely about the frontier when Berlin had ordered his arrest.

Parrilli concluded his mission and on his return to Italy transmitted the three following questions from Dulles to Wolff:

1. Had Wolff the authority to act alone?
2. If, as a replacement to Kesselring a new commander should arrive, could and would Wolff persuade him to act with him?
3. If the new commander was not disposed to act in collaboration, would Wolff act against his orders?

Wolff told Parrilli that he was certain Kesselring would not return to Italy and that the name of the new commander was still unknown. He stated, "Dulles may count on me whatever happens. It is my firm intent to bring to fruition the plans arranged with Dulles the 8th of March in Zurich. I hope to be able to convince the new commander — and I have many arguments!"

Then before letting Parrilli leave for Switzerland he gave the orders in his presence which countermanded the projected destruction in North Italy.

Parrilli, as soon as he reached Swiss territory, got in touch with Rasmann and reported the result of his mission.

Rusmann and Parrilli acted as intermediaries with the Americans and had to use all their influence and their power of persuasion to convince the Americans that Wolff had not changed any of his intentions. Dulles was finally persuaded and went to the Allied Headquarters in France to ask that a military delegation be sent to Switzerland to treat with Wolff.

Gaevernitz said to Rusmann, "You can see, Professor, it is not easy to start negotiations!"

The 15th of March Parrilli returned to Italy to inform Wolff from Dulles that a military mission would come from GHQ Caserta to Switzerland.

It was Wolff this time who seemed to be in not too much of a hurry. He had realized that, contrary to his first summing up of the situation, without the concurrence of the Army, it would be very difficult to accomplish the surrender.

General ^Xvon Ficklinghof, who was his friend, had been appointed as Kesselring's successor, and he hoped to readily associate him with the project. But the new Commander in Chief had not yet arrived in Italy and he had not been able to confer with him. He accepted, however, the 19th of March as the date of the next meeting in Switzerland, at which he appeared accompanied by Werner and Zimmer.

On the date arranged the Germans and the Americans met at Ascona. The technical preparation of the new meeting had been entrusted to Major Weibel, who was absolutely trusted by the Americans. The Americans, however, being aware of their proximity to the Italian frontier and, therefore, to the German troops, thought it wise to prepare for any eventuality by having machine guns in the garden and to keep a large bit of the lake under surveillance.

Before the meeting Rasmann and Parrilli had a talk with Wolff at Lugano.

Rasmann wanted to talk with Wolff before the meeting to clear up an ambiguity that he thought present in the statement of the German General.

Dulles had summoned the Allied military representatives on the basis of the affirmative reply given by Wolff to Parrilli; that is to say, that he would bring about the surrender even against the will of the Commander in Chief of the German Armed Forces in Italy. When Parrilli told Rasmann that Wolff would come on the 19th of March, he had also told him that Wolff seemed to have changed his mind, inasmuch as he considered it would be impossible to act in opposition to the German military authority in Italy.

Rasmann, fearing that Dulles, when confronted with this reservation, would cancel the meeting, assumed the responsibility of not transmitting this part of Wolff's reply.

By meeting him at Lugano and by talking with him before he met the Allies, he hoped to inform him of the state of affairs and to warn him that a contradiction in his statement, in view of the suspicions of the Americans, could be fatal to the whole outcome.

Wolff was able to prove to Rasmann that there was no contradiction, but only a misunderstanding. He had said to Parrilli, "Dulles can count on me with or without the German Commander." (Ich stehe zu Dulles mit und ohne den deutschen Kommandanten.) Parrilli had understood that the surrender could be accomplished with or without the approval of the Commander of the German troops, and had so informed Dulles, who, as a result of this communication, had summoned the Allied Military Mission to Switzerland. Wolff, instead, had merely meant to reaffirm his loyalty to Dulles, but not that the surrender would be brought about against the wishes of the Commander of the

Army. Through this misunderstanding the reason would have vanished that had caused Dulles to demand the Anglo-American mission to Switzerland. This would reawaken the dormant suspicions of Dulles, who might have seen in Wolff's words an expedient to gain time and confuse the situation.

It was agreed between Wolff and Busmann to present the following proposals to the Americans, giving them a chance to choose whichever they preferred:

1. If, in the final analysis, it was considered absolutely necessary, Wolff would be willing to try to bring about the surrender by himself, but he would explain the difficulties to be encountered.

2. It might be preferable to await the arrival of Viettinghof and to persuade him to collaborate, especially in view of the friendship existing between Wolff and the new Commander in Chief. Wolff was almost certain that he could favorably influence Viettinghof.

3. Wolff would be glad to go to Kesselring's new Headquarters on the Western Front and see if he could obtain his authorization to accomplish the surrender.

Having obtained Kesselring's authorization, it would be easy enough to convince Viettinghof, who, being a "non-political" general and a great friend of Kesselring, would presumably listen most willingly to the suggestions of the Field Marshal.

Wolff stressed an additional possibility for the future, namely, that in his talk with Kesselring he hoped to persuade him to combine the surrender of the Western Front with that of the Italian Sector.

Busmann persisted in warning Wolff of the necessity of comporting himself in such a manner as not to destroy Dulles' confidence; it was therefore necessary that he present his decision as definite and irrevocable, while

putting in proper relief the fact that the removal of Kesselring had created an entirely new and unforeseen state of affairs.

Wolff for his part had insisted on the conditions of surrender that would be accorded his collaborators, particularly the Generals (among whom was Graziani) who would have followed him. He wished to be assured by the Allies that they would be accorded honorable and chivalrous treatment. He asked nothing for himself, but stated that he could do nothing until he had been given a formal assurance as to this matter.

(At Ascona in a little villa belonging to the Americans there was held a first conference between Wolff, Dulles and Gaspari: at a second conference General Terence S. Airey of the British General Staff, and General Lyman L. Lemnitzer of the American Army, were also present.

The two generals, with the aid of Waibel, had assumed in Switzerland the names of two sergeants in the American Army: Nicholson and McNealey.)

The Swiss government continued to the very end to remain in the dark in regard to all these events.

During the meeting, Rasmann took Wenner into the garden to convince him since he had been pointed out by Zimmer as being the most sceptical.

Having also learned from Zimmer that Wolff had brought important documents with him, Rasmann begged Wolff to turn these over to the Allies as a proof of his loyalty and good faith.

At the Ascona conference it was decided to let Wolff go to Kesselring, to endeavor to obtain his authorization to accomplish the surrender. Wolff had planned to leave the next day and be back within three days at the most.

Wenner remarked, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

The prophetic words of Wenner proved too true; Wolff ran into difficulties on his trip. On the date set for his return, that is the 24th of March, he did not appear nor did he send any message.

OK
JWH
8 Mar 57

It was not till the 29th of March that Wolff returned to Italy. The night before the ~~German High Command~~ of the SS notified Parrilli of Wolff's return. Parrilli was able to convince Rauff that it was imperative that he go at once to Switzerland to personally confirm the news to Waibel and Busmann.

Parrilli, with the consent of his friends, tried in every way to win over to their plan the head of the German Police for Lombardy and the Piedmont, for his attitude was visibly unfavorable to the negotiations.

Waibel profited by Rauff's visit to ask for the release of 5 political prisoners, to which Rauff agreed.

The 30th of March Wolff and Parrilli met at Fasano. Wolff reported to Parrilli: "Kesselring, in spite of being snowed under with work, received me twice and listened with great interest. He, also, is of the opinion that we should enter into negotiations with the Allies, particularly as he is certain we cannot resist on the Western Front for more than three, or at the most, four weeks. At the end of this period the reserves will be exhausted."

Kesselring had also spoken to Wolff concerning the issuance of a new "Versweiflungswaffe" (weapon of desperation) which was expected daily and which was to be used on the Western Front. Kesselring himself did not know the exact nature of the weapon but the effects had been described to him as so terrible that he had decided to send in his resignation rather than have his name linked with such a weapon.

In his second talk with Wolff the Field Marshall was more reserved, saying that a surrender on the Western Front seemed impossible as he felt he was not completely master of the situation.

However, he was not opposed to such a step being taken by Vlettinghof, nor to Wolff's plan in general.

While the talks were taking place with Kesselring, Wolff received an urgent call from Berlin, requesting him to explain his contact with the Allies.

These contretemps had prevented Wolff meeting Viettinghof. Parrilli announced then to the head of the SS that he would not return to Ascona till he had been informed of the result of the meeting with Viettinghof. Zimmer had to go to Ascona to inform the American delegates of what had happened and to announce the imminent arrival of Wolff and Parrilli. The last named had had the impression that, after his talk with Himmler, Wolff had become more cautious and was seeking to gain time. However, he preferred to stay near Fasano, because he believed that personally he could influence the German General. On the other hand, the General considered it helpful to have Parrilli within reach.

The 31st of March the meeting of Wolff and Viettinghof took place. General ^{former} Röttiger, Chief of Staff of the Commander of the German Forces in Italy, was also present.

The predictions of Wolff were fulfilled because both Röttiger and Viettinghof announced that they favored a surrender. They, like Kesselring, knew that the Allied offensive was in an advanced state of preparation, and that they did not have the means of opposing it for more than a few weeks.

Wolff informed them that he would go to Switzerland where he would definitely arrange for the surrender and that he would accept the date set by Dulles: eight o'clock in the evening of April 2nd.

In the meanwhile Himmler, acting on a rumor that had reached him from Italy, took Wolff's family under his "personal protection".

Himmler himself telephoned this decision to Wolff, warning him once again not to leave the Italian zone.

Wolff said to Parrilli: "I do not lack the courage to go to Switzerland: if necessary I would not hesitate to even sacrifice my family to the cause. But I am certain that now that Himmler has spoken to me, that there is already an individual with a bullet ready for me. He may even be here at GHQ, maybe on his way here. The end of the story would be a superb funeral at the expense of the State. But my corpse would be of no use to the Allies, nor, being dead, could I render any service to my people. It is impossible, therefore, for me to leave Fasano at this time. Go to Dulles and ask if, instead of my coming, he will send an Allied Superior Officer to Fasano, have him lodged secretly, and from here he can contact GHQ in Caserta."

General Lemnitzer in Switzerland made the counter proposal, in view of the impossibility of Wolff's coming, of sending plenipotentiaries across the firing line. The passport to pass the Allied line was "Nuremberg".

The 5th of April Parrilli was presented to Viettinghof and Stüttgen. At this meeting there was much talk of the weather, but there were only brief and vague allusions to the subject dear to Parrilli's heart.

In a subsequent tete-a-tete Wolff informed Parrilli that Viettinghof demanded guarantees. The German Commander in Chief wished to be certain that the surrender would be accomplished in such a way that history could not some day call him a traitor to his country.

Also Viettinghof asked to see the draft of the articles of surrender before authorising its signature; in that way the plenipotentiaries delegated to sign would only have to make one trip across the front lines.

Zimmer was sent to transmit Viettinghof's request to Himmann. The 8th of April Himmann and Zimmer were joined by Parrilli, bearing a document in which the German proposals were specified. The document was given to the Americans in Bern. Dulles and Gaevernits translated it and sent it in code to the Allied Headquarters in Caserta.

On his return to Fasano, Parrilli realised that other delays threatened to hinder the negotiations; Viettinghof had presented another proposal, namely, that the Allies should advance about 10 kilometers a day.

Viettinghof, according to Wolff, was profoundly upset by the information received from Berlin that the situation was about to be completely reversed and that Germany was assured of victory. The Commander in Chief was vacillating and did not want to lay down his arms until he had been convinced that every last sacrifice of human life had been proved to be futile.

Also Himmler had again called Wolff to Berlin.

Fearing the worst, Wolff thought it wiser to inform Himmler somewhat of the state of affairs. He, therefore, wrote him a letter in which he informed him of the necessity of finding a solution, based on a compromise, before this became impossible due to Russian intervention.

The terms requested would include:

1. The avoidance of imprisonment for the German troops.
2. The granting of an honorable surrender.
3. The unhampered withdrawal of the troops.

In his letter Wolff reiterated that he had acted in the best interests of the German people. He stressed the importance of the fact that the negotiations would preserve the troops, who by thus avoiding capture on the Southern Front, would be available later for keeping order in Germany, and probably also to form a future nucleus of the SS under some other name. He ended by asking Himmler to come to him to personally take cognisance of

the situation, as he, Wolff, could no longer leave Italy, in view of the political developments.

This letter was sent to Himmler by means of Dr. Hans Gerd, a trusted friend of Wolff, who was summoned from Monaco for that purpose. Parrilli stayed at Fasano to await Himmler's reply.

During those days Roosevelt's death was announced. The decease of the President of the United States had a particular bearing on the pending negotiations because thereby Dulles lost his main support.

Himmler's answer to Wolff was prompt. It summoned him to appear in Berlin immediately. Though doubtful of the outcome, Wolff decided to obey. Before leaving he gave Parrilli a folder containing his testament:

"My Will to be given to Mr. Dulles by Baron Luigi Parrilli"

"In the event that I do not return from Berlin:

"1. If I should lose my post of Command, or should be imprisoned, and thereby the plan to which I have agreed could not be brought to fruition, I beg that you will not let the consequences fall on the German people nor on the German troops in Italy.

"2. If after my death my memory or my honor should be attacked, I beg that Mr. Dulles will rehabilitate it by making public the true reasons and the humane ideals that were my motives, and to make it known that I did not act for any selfish reason, nor as a traitor, but with the hope and conviction of saving the German people as much as possible.

"3. After my death I beg Mr. Dulles, in remembrance of the ideal for which I shall have died, that he will accord to the German and Italian troops honorable conditions of surrender.

"4. After my death, I beg Mr. Dulles to protect my two families, as far as he is able, that they be not destroyed."

Carrying Wolff's testament, Parrilli crossed the frontier once again to bring the document and the news of Wolff's departure for Berlin to Mussmann and Waibel.

They were received by Dulles, but they thought it wiser not to speak of Wolff's testament, either because of the effect on Dulles of the death of President Roosevelt, his friend, or because they felt that the news of Wolff's departure for Berlin would cause enough of an unfavorable impression.

Dulles took advantage of the meeting to tell them that the Russians were opposed to the negotiations, of which fact Roosevelt had informed him a few days before he died.

Meanwhile Wolff arrived in Berlin.

The 17th of April he had a long talk with Himmler, which lasted from two in the afternoon till one the following morning. After four hours Kaltenbrunner joined them and remained till the end.

Before Kaltenbrunner appeared, Wolff informed Himmler that if the Germans had agreed to an immediate surrender to the Anglo-Americans, these would not have been averse to continuing the war on the side of Germany against the Russians.

Himmler's answer was that he had burned the letter because it was so compromising.

Himmler appeared to Wolff a broken man, devoid of all energy and will power. Kaltenbrunner, on the other hand, seemed more aggressive and suspicious than ever. Nevertheless he did not seem to possess the power to decide Wolff's fate, so Wolff decided on a bold move, turned to the attack and charged that Kaltenbrunner's intelligence service was poor, and that the accusations brought against him were frankly an offense and a rank injustice.

Finally Wolff agreed to go with Kaltenbrunner to Hitler to explain the facts and to ask him to judge them. Himmler preferred to absent himself from the conference with Hitler.

At five o'clock on the 18th of April Kaltenbrunner and Wolff were received by Hitler. Hitler, even more than Himmler, had the appearance of a finished man. He seemed suddenly to have aged by 20 years; stooped, with trembling hands, pale face and eyes distraught, he scarcely seemed to know what was going on about him.

Hitler barely listened to the justification of Wolff; he interrupted him almost immediately to launch an interminable monologue in which he alternately talked of "resistance" and certainty that there would be a split between the Allies. He ended by charging Wolff to tell Viettinghof to defend the Italian front with the greatest determination. The conference ended thus. Wolff had bluffed and won.

The 23rd of April Wolff returned to Switzerland determined to sign the surrender. He was accompanied by Wenner and by Viettinghof's delegate, who possessed full powers, Lt. Col. Victor von Schweinitz.

Greatly to the surprise of the Germans, Dulles refused to receive them. He had received instructions from Washington to break off negotiations. Dulles was uncertain as to whether this was due to a veto imposed by the Russians, or to the suspicions aroused by Wolff's journey to Berlin.

Maibei, Ruzmann and Parrilli made every possible effort to prevent Dulles' letting the German delegation depart without accomplishing their project, which the three had brought thus far through difficulties and hindrances of every kind. Gaevernits, an American of German origin, and, therefore, the most capable of understanding the psychology of the group lead by Wolff, took it upon himself to explain to Dulles the point of view of the Germans and the Italians.

Dulles let himself be convinced, and telegraphed to Caserta announcing the arrival of the German delegation in Switzerland.

Most aptly a telegram came from Himmler to Wolff, forwarded by Zimmer to Busmann. Himmler forbade Wolff for the nth time to leave the Italian Zone and ordered him to employ every possible means in combatting the offensive launched by the Allies on the 1st of April on the Italian Front. It was a proof that Wolff was acting on his own initiative, and against the will of Hitler.

Himmler's telegram had no effect on Wolff. Before leaving for Switzerland he had agreed with Viettinghof, Röttiger, Pohl and finally with the Gauleiter ^{*}Hofer, not to obey any further orders that Berlin might issue concerning the Italian Zone.

The reply from Caserta to Dulles' telegram was in the affirmative: Alexander was still interested in the negotiations and Dulles was requested to hold the German delegation pending further communications.

Busmann urged Wolff to leave for Italy and to announce the capitulation, together with Viettinghof, without further loss of time. Wenner could go to Caserta to sign the surrender, if he were given full powers, together with Schweinitz. It would only be necessary for Wolff to delegate Wenner as his official representative.

Wolff accepted the suggestion and left for Italy.

At Carnobbio he was surrounded by Partisans and stopped. He succeeded finally in continuing the journey, thanks to Waibel, assisted by the American Vice-Consul at Ingano, Donald ^{*}Jones, Sgt. ^{*}Franco Livio of the Swiss Intelligence Service, and of the Italian doctors ^{*}Peregrini and ^{*}Ventura, who possessed the confidence of the Italian C L N.

Schweinits and Wenner left Switzerland the 28th of April and on the 29th signed the surrender at Caserta. They affixed their signatures with the reservation that the surrender would be confirmed by Viettinghof and Wolff. The confirmation was to reach the Americans not later than 12 on the 2nd of May.

In the meanwhile the German Headquarters were transferred to Bolzano. Viettinghof was no longer in command because on the 29th of April he was relieved.

With the shortening of the lines on the Western Front, Kesselring found that he was being assigned a sector that included Bavaria, the South Tyrol and the Italian Zone.

In place of Viettinghof, Kesselring named General Schultz and Wentzel, who refused to listen to any talk of surrender. Röttiger, who temporarily was taking Viettinghof's place, insisted with Schultz and Wentzel that they would have to recognize the signature of the surrender, as signed by Schweinits and Wenner.

The Generals Herr and Lemelsen, commanding respectively the 10th and 11th Armored Forces, were of the same opinion as Röttiger.

As Schultz and Wentzel were not disposed to agree, Röttiger, with the approval of Wolff, had them arrested.

The arrest took place on the 1st of May. The German Military authorities had taken the irrevocable decision to announce the cessation of firing that night.

Gauleiter Hofer changed his mind at the last moment and informed Headquarters of what was happening.

Kaltenbrunner immediately sent into the South Tyrol a special force of SS with the order to arrest all who had taken part in the capitulation.

But the envoys of Kaltenbrunner could not accomplish this mission due to the general confusion, the rapid succession of events (among which was the death of Hitler), and above all due to the determination of the leader of the group, Wolff himself, who was ready to enter the lists with any one opposed to the execution of the capitulation.

The 2nd of May at 4 in the morning he had a last long talk on the telephone with Kesselring.

The Field Marshal was still doubtful and seemed recalcitrant, but, in view of the general dissolution, and the fact that Viettinghof had been officially represented at Caserta, Kesselring finally bowed to the accomplished fact.

At 12 on the 2nd of May the Germans ceased firing. Schultz and Wentzel were released and left for Germany, while Viettinghof reassumed command of the Wehrmacht in Italy.

The 4th of May an Anglo-American Commission arrived in Bolzano to take over the government. The 14th of May the Allied troops completed the occupation of North Italy.

Thus was concluded the active phase of the German capitulation in Italy.

I have written the facts as they were told to me by qualified and authoritative sources.

The exactness of my version was confirmed by the Germans, where it was possible for me to gather details concerning the reasons that impelled the Germans to enter into negotiations with the Allies.

It is still not clear for what reasons Wolff and his group conducted long and dangerous discussions during two months to finally conclude an unconditional surrender, which could have been accomplished with a very brief exchange of views between the parties.

If it was merely to surrender without conditions, the German troops could have quietly awaited the Allied offensive and then laid down their arms.

At Flensburg, the Governor de Doenitz, knowing that the troops were cut off in Norway and Denmark, and were in no position to resist, ended the war with an unconditional surrender. There were no negotiations with the Allies and the responsible commanders did not expose themselves to being considered traitors.

It could be said that in Italy Wolff and his collaborators sought their own safety. The position held by Wolff and his rank in the SS might justify this observation..... His responsibility as a war criminal remains to be proven.

If Wolff's action had been dictated purely from a selfish motive, he might have asked for himself and his collaborators the assurance of several millions and a hospitable reception in some far country that was peaceful and neutral, to which, as a last mission, the Allies would have to transport him. Unconditional surrender of the Italian Front was well worth such a concession, and such a request would not have scandalized the secret services of his adversaries.

To judge the results, the personal welfare of the negotiators of the surrender must instead be put in the background. Wolff for three years has been a prisoner of the Anglo-Americans, while his wife and family are in

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dire need. The post war adventures of Dollman have already been told; as to Wenner, we may add that until a short time ago he also was deprived of his liberty.

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